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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, it's been another great week here in New England. Comfortable temperatures (and no humidity!) during the day, a few rain showers at night. I played in a golf tournament on Thursday, and we ran into a few typical summer thunder, rain, and lightning bursts near the end of the round. We finished out the round despite the concerns of one of our foursome! We fell one place out of the money. It's good to be able to get out on the course more than I usually do.

Today starts the beginning of another two-week vacation; and this time my wife will be off as well. We have a few plans, and will definitely get in some rest and relaxation! I think that we're both overdue, my wife more than me. This weekend also marks the beginning of a long holiday weekend here in the States, July 4th, and is marked by the following Monday as a legal holiday (yes, we're strange with regard to holidays here in the U.S.!). So, please be safe out there this weekend. Watch out for fireworks and drinking! We should be pretty safe around here as our annual block party is celebrated this weekend. Stay at home and party! Enjoy the 4th, however you plan to celebrate.

Until next time...

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COPS and NEWSie Sources Complemented

In the initial release of COPS sources, there was an entire directory missing. Those missing files are now available for download on TOPP. (Thanks to Sascha and Wilfried!) But that is not all: Recently, FreeMiNT maintainer Frank Naumann has put some efforts into adapting the COPS sources to be compatible to GCC and has now succeeded in compiling stable and useable binaries! Knowing that, it might not come as a shock to find out that the sources has been added to the FreeMiNT CVS and can now be maintained by MiNT developers. In other words: -COPS is back! :)

Over to NEWSie. As the previously released sources to v0.96 was not the most recent ones, John has now sent us the files for the 0.961 version.

NEWSie still has no new maintainer, but GFA guru Lonny Pursell has set out to squash a few of the most infamous NEWSie bugs in the near future.

Both applications are released under GPL.

http://topp.atari-users.net/

Paul Slocum Releases Music CD

Tree Wave, a two piece band from Texas that makes pop songs using obsolete computer and video game equipment as instruments, has released their first music CD, Cabana EP+. Paul Slocum, creator of the Atari 2600 Synthcart and Testcart, codes the music primarily on an Atari 2600, Commodore 64, Compaq 286, and Epson dot matrix printer, and Lauren Gray adds lush vocals. You can listen to two of the Cabana EP+ tracks as well as purchase the CD in the AtariAge Store (www.atariage.com/store), and can visit the Tree Wave web site (treewave.com) to learn more about the band.

http://www.atariage.com/store/product_info.php?products_id=285

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. This is going to be a 'down and dirty' column this week. I am, quite simply, exhausted. My company is getting ready to shut down for vacation and the extra work would seem to be more than the work required to just go on with business as usual.

But does anyone ever ask me? Nooooo. <grin>

The one thing (apart from reminding you to register to vote) I want to mention is that The Forth of July is upon us. There's sure to be much merriment and libation, so be responsible on as many levels as you can manage. Hey, I like a few beers here and there as much as the next guy, but too often we lose track of our limits.

And even if you stay stone-cold sober, remember: The other guy might not be as conscientious.

You know, I think that's (another) wide-spread problem today... we've forgotten how to put ourselves in the other guy's place. And not just where drinking and having a good time is concerned either.

We're so tied up in our own lives these days that it's easy for us to forget that everyone else has the same problems as we do. Perhaps it's just part of our 'big purple dinosaur' philosophy or a cumulative genetic breakdown or maybe even damage from cosmic rays getting through the ever-thinning ozone layer, but there's very little doubt about it...

we’re more self-absorbed as a whole than any that have come before us. And I guess that does, indeed make us.... special. How about that? <Grin>

Well, let’s get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

’Rich’ asks for help in converting ST documents into PC format:

"This must have been done by someone - but there are no available posts here to read. Has someone got a program or a Link to a program that will allow my PC to read and convert WORD PLUS FILES created on my ST, please?

I have managed to copy my discs into my PC but cannot get it to read then convert them to a Word document, for example."

David Bolt tells Rich:

"Others have suggested converting the files into RTF format and importing those. After a very quick hunt, I’ve found a Word+ to RTF convertor that should run under Windows, using a DOS prompt, at:

<URL:http://www.funet.fi/pub/atari/util/wpls2rtf.zip> "

John Clark agrees:

"Use Word+ to save them as .RTF files. The PC can then read them."

Peter West points out the flaw in that line of thought:

"First Word+ can’t save as RTF - at least the Atari version can’t - only WordPlus DOC and ASCII. I presume Rich no longer has an Atari or 1Word+ - if he has, then saving as ASCII will allow Word to read them; or run an Atari emulator - provided he still has the WP program disk.

If not, use an ASCII editor (?Notepad?), remove the header down to and including the ruler, then multiple search and replace: Replace ASCII 028, 029 and 030 with a space, and all Esc ? combinations (where ’?’ is a wildcard) with nothing (these are style and end-of-page commands etc). You will be left with pure text. You could with a little more work retain any styles by converting the Esc combinations to e-mail style attributes: Esc+129 (umlaut-u) = Bold on (mark *), Esc+130 (e-accent acute) = Light on (mark ~), Esc+132 (umlaut-a) = Italic (mark /), Esc+136 (e-circumflex) = Underlined on (mark _), Esc+176 (a-tilde) = Superscript (mark say +), Esc+160 (a-acute) = Subscript (mark say -). Esc+128 (C-tilde) switches each style off again (place same marker as for switching attribute on); it also marks formfeeds. Combinations are also possible - there is a good discussion about this in the IdeaList documentation.

Then in Word you can convert the e-mail style attributes back to

what they should be. Longwinded, but doable."

John tells Peter:

"Sorry it was so long ago that I used First Word+. I moved on to Calligrapher, which exported as .RTF. That was the way I got my ST to talk to the PC, via Word, at work."

Jim DeClercq adds:

"If you are using a mumble mumble PC, get the program Ultra Edit, which is shareware, and pay Ian Mead (?) his $30 USD for it. It is a programmers and general purpose editor, and you can use it to take the ruler line off of Word Plus files so another program can read it, and also excise any other characters a PC program cannot handle. Yes, Notepad will do it, but Ultra Edit will do it better.

If using an Atari emulator, Edith is freeware, I think. I have a registered copy. And Edith will do search and replace, fast and well.

Or, get something much better than Word, IMHO, which is Tempus-Word."

Joseph Place asks:

"Anyone ever use 800XL Deejay with a Falcon? I think it may require using the lan port? The serial port is not working. The DOC is in German, so I haven't been able to figure it out."

Edward Baiz tells Joseph:

"I use 800XLDJ with my Hades and it works great. I use the Modem 1 port on my Hades. You should be able to do the same for the Falcon and the STe. If you need any DI image files, email me. I have a lot that I will soon be putting on CD. I am still in the process of making more files for the program."

Joseph replies:

"It works fine on my STe, but I can't get it to work on my Falcon. The program runs, but I can't get any transfers going. As far as I can tell from translating the DOCs it looks like some hardware mods are required to use the Falcon. I gave up and went back to the STe."

Mark Bedingfield asks Joseph:

"Have you tried using HSmodem? The patches you are referring to, are probably the above patch. It fixes some compatibility issues. I am pretty sure it is possible to make the Falcon's modem port appear the same as the ST's, but I have forgotten what the patch for that is. I would doubt you would need a hardware mod of any kind."

Joseph tells Mark:

"Yes, I’m using HSmodem7. I also tried the serial.cpx to try to direct to the serial port, but transfers still do not work."

Jason Davey asks about swapping Falcon TOS ROMs:

"I am looking at purchasing a Falcon which currently has German TOS ROMs installed. I want UK English ROMs, where could I get them?"

Derryck Croker tells Jason:

"I suppose you might get the ROM from Atari Workshop, but alternatively you could consider installing Magic which would give you effectively an English machine?

Hmm, what about physical keyboard keys, are they the same for UK and German machines?"

Matthias Arndt tells Derryck:

"Yes - electronically completely the same except for the sticker with the symbol on. You could simply take an old english keyboard from a 1040 or the like - should work in Falcon as well if you need english stickers on top of the keys.
The meaning of each key is software configurable."

Derryck tells Matthias:

"I also forgot that the OS is multi-lingual too!"

’BeeBee’ tells Derryck:

"That ’s true! But, something is wrong! You aren’t obliged to have cpx to change nvram! Software, on floppy can do the job:)

And another point wrong too! If, you burn your rom! It’s because you have the kit electronic to do the job! So if something don’t run! just erase and burn again!

Not all the tos 4.** have this possibility! You need to see a little window under the paper. To erase you need uv lamp.... You need to unplug the chip.....

It’s completely different with eeprom! You don’t need special electronic installation! For ct60 centronic adaptor and special soft is require, that all!

It’s all the difference for this point between the ct2 and ct60!

It’s true today for agp&pci graphic cards! Sometime the same card is sold with rom or eeprom! It’s one point to do choice today!

And the last point, if a hack exist to put magicC on rom, it’s for fun!
I suppose, the concept or do the right job! I never test myself!
Of, course, it’s a little part of magicC! it’s the thin boot:-) for directly boot magicC!"

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Have a happy, healthy, and safe July Forth celebration. Please, please, please don’t drink and drive... the life you save may be mine! ’Till next week, keep your ears open and listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - ’Riddick’ Revels in Violence, Death!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Former Cancer Patient Debuts Game!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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’Riddick’ Revels in Butchery, Profanity

In the flourishing forest of computerized adventures, game developers are always looking for something new to make their product stand out.

The folks behind "The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay" have come up with three elements that immediately grab your attention: shadows, swearing and smokes.

Now, those are not necessarily good things, but I’ll get to that in a second.

"Butcher Bay" is an extremely violent game that has been designed as a prequel to the Vin Diesel science fiction movies "Chronicles of Riddick" released in early June, and the first Riddick movie, "Pitch Black" (2000).

In this game - $50 for Xbox - Diesel lends his distinctive voice to Richard B. Riddick, the baddest of the bad guys ever to enter a Butcher Bay prison cell.

I was only planning to play it for a few hours as part of a wrapup of movie-related games due out this summer. But, frankly, once I started, I found it difficult to stop.

The game opens with Riddick in custody and about to land on the prison planet. As a harbinger of the violence to come, your first task is to snap

the neck of your captor. The game gives you two ways to do that - quick and silent, or slow and noisy.

Then you have to enter the prison, take out guards, move through air vents, find some heavy weaponry, perform hand-to-hand combat, learn to use the shadows to your advantage, and figure out how to operate the automated health rejuvenator, which seems to have been inspired by the Borg in Star Trek.

The first level of the game turns out to be a dream sequence. Then the adventure begins in earnest, as Riddick is taken to his cell and given a few brutal lessons in prison politics.

"Butcher Bay" is not big on firepower, at least on the early levels I played. One of the joys of this game is being rewarded for sneaking up on your opponents. You can also pummel opponents into oblivion, or drop down on them from aerial walkways.

To avoid discovery, the game lets you grab dead opponents and drag them into the shadows. When you drop into stealth mode you can’t be seen and the screen turns blue, a helpful feature.

The prison itself is a truly hideous place, reminiscent of "The Suffering" - another prison-based game. Blood spatters the walls. In the infirmary, guards beat prisoners who complain they’ve waited a long time to see the doctor. Hygiene is a hollow promise.

One element of the game I found incredibly distracting was - of all things - Riddick’s shadow.

Shadows are elements that make a game look realistic. But in "Butcher Bay," they are maddeningly wrong. Instead of being gray with diffuse edges, as they are in most real-life situations, they’re sharp, pitch black, and sometimes misaligned. To make matters worse, they get more screen time than Riddick himself.

It’s a surprising deficiency in a game that uses some hotshot programing tools to make the graphics unusually realistic, eliminating a lot of the sharp edges that, in lesser games, make hands and other body parts appear blocky.

As for the swearing, when you have a game set on a prison planet with some of the toughest inmates in the galaxy, you’ve got to expect foul language.

I can spew profanity with the best of them, but even I was taken aback by all the obscenities, and that was just in the narration for the training video - never mind the actual game itself. It’s as if the developers are trying to show what tough guys they are.

Needless to say, the game’s "Mature" rating is well deserved.

As for the smokes, I can’t recall ever seeing a game that uses cigarettes as a reward. Each pack, with brand names like Voodoo ("Give in to the magic"), unlocks a piece of artwork or a stillframe from the new Riddick movie.

Anti-smoking advocates have long complained about the way the entertainment industry tries to make tobacco seem cool. This game is a perfect example of that, especially when it appears to mock cigarette warning labels. (One brand advises: "Do not feed to children.")

I wonder if the developers would be just as willing to encourage players to collect packets of heroin to get access to bonus features. But maybe I shouldn’t be giving them ideas.

On the other hand, this game revels in violence and death. So what’s a slow deadly addiction compared with a quick snap of the vertebrae?

Former Cancer Patient Debuts Video Game

Ben Duskin has helped turn fighting cancer into a game. When the 9-year-old former leukemia patient was asked if he had an unrequited wish by the Make-A-Wish Foundation, Ben requested a video game be made that fellow cancer sufferers could play to take their mind of the painful side effects of chemotherapy.

"I really like video games," Duskin said Tuesday. "And I wanted to do something special, something more than going on a Disney cruise and stuff like that."

Enter Eric Johnston, a software engineer for LucasArts who helped create such games as "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade," "Loom" and "The Secret of Monkey Island."

Johnston agreed to volunteer his time to help Ben achieve his wish. Johnston persuaded his bosses to donate LucasArts facilities after hours and met with Ben once a week for six months as they developed "Ben’s Game."

The game’s central character, modeled after Ben, zooms around the screen on a skateboard, zapping mutated cells and collecting seven shields to protect against common side effects of chemotherapy, which include nausea, hair loss and fevers.

"We spent a long time discussing what he wanted this game to look like," Johnston said at the game’s unveiling at the University of California, San Francisco Pediatric Treatment Center. "This is his game."

Duskin’s leukemia is in remission and he is on summer break between fourth and fifth grades. UCSF officials said "Ben’s Game" is now a staple in the children’s chemotherapy ward.

"I feel really good in my heart that lots of people are playing it," Ben said.

The game can also be downloaded for free at http://www.makewish.org/ben

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Supreme Court Bars Enforcement of Internet Porn Law

A closely divided U.S. Supreme Court on Tuesday barred enforcement of a federal law designed to keep Internet pornography away from children because it likely violates constitutional free-speech rights.

The 5-4 ruling, however, does not resolve the constitutional question in a case pitting free speech against efforts by the U.S. Congress to protect minors from online pornography.

The court majority sent the case back to a federal judge in Philadelphia for a trial to consider changes in technology and law since the 1998 adoption of the Child Online Protection Act. The ruling gave the government another chance to show the law does not impose an unconstitutional burden.

The ruling marked the second time the court has considered the 1998 law, but failed to issue a definitive ruling on it.

The law in question requires that Web site operators use credit cards or adult access codes and personal identification numbers to keep minors from seeing harmful pornography. Violators face up to six months in prison and fines of as much as $50,000 a day.

Justice Anthony Kennedy in the majority opinion upheld an injunction that has blocked the U.S. Justice Department from enforcing the law and from bringing any criminal cases.

Kennedy said a trial can decide whether blocking and filtering software would be a less restrictive alternative to the law. Such software would likely be a more effective way to restrict access by children to harmful material.

He said the factual record developed in the case had been gathered by the judge in 1999 and that Internet technology and the legal landscape had changed.

Kennedy also said a congressionally appointed commission has concluded filters are more effective than the verification screens required by the law.

The Supreme Court last year upheld a law that requires content filters in libraries that pay for Internet access with government funds.

Kennedy said Congress adopted two other laws that might qualify as less restrictive alternatives to the 1998 one. One prohibits misleading domain names and the other creates a "Dot Kids" domain that would be safe for minors, he said.

Thirteen Web sites have set up child-friendly domains in the .kids.us Internet domain since it was set up in September 2003.

The government also can still enforce existing obscenity laws, Kennedy said.

Ann Beeson of the American Civil Liberties Union, which was among those challenging the law, urged Attorney General John Ashcroft to stop defending it.

"If he insists on going back to trial, we are confident that the lower court will again find that the law went too far," she said.

Justice Department spokesman Mark Corallo expressed concern the court "yet again opposed these common-sense measures to protect America's children."

"The department will continue to work to defend children from the dangerous predators who lurk in the dark shadows of the World Wide Web," he said in a statement.

One of the law's sponsors said he would ask the Justice Department to mount an aggressive case.

"Larry Flynt can't set up in front of a news store handing out free copies of Hustler to minors, and the operators of pornographic Web sites shouldn't be allowed to entice a kid with a teaser page," Ohio Republican Rep. Michael Oxley said.

Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Antonin Scalia and Stephen Breyer dissented. They said they would uphold the law as constitutional.

"The court's decision removes an important weapon from the prosecutorial arsenal," Breyer said.

ISPs Win Canadian Music Downloading Case

Canada's Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that Internet service providers do not have to pay royalties to composers and artists for music downloaded by Web customers.

Companies providing wide access to the Web are merely "intermediaries" who are not bound by Canadian copyright legislation, the court said in a 9-0 ruling.

At issue was an effort by the Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada, or SOCAN, to force Internet service providers to pay a tariff.

SOCAN also wanted to extend Canadian copyright law beyond the country's borders and apply it to offshore Web sites that serve Canadians.

Opposing the effort was the Canadian Association of Internet Providers, including the Canadian subsidiaries of some of the world's high-tech giants, like Sprint Corp., America Online Inc., MCI, IBM Corp. and Yahoo! Inc.

The service providers argued that artists should seek royalties directly from Web sites offering their work, not from companies providing wider-ranging access to the Web.

The case was closely watched abroad because of the international implications for the computer and music industries. The music industry says it has lost billions of dollars in revenue in recent years as people shunned traditional stores and downloaded music from the Internet.

SOCAN's effort contrasted with the legal route taken by the recording

industry in the United States, where the usual tactic has been to sue individual file-sharing services and customers who download music.

The Recording Industry Association of America has launched about 2,000 lawsuits against file swappers since last year. The RIAA has settled hundreds of those cases, generally for a few thousand dollars each.

The attempt to collect instead from service providers was significant because they provide an easier target for litigation than tracking down a myriad of individual Web sites and customers.

The Canadian Recording Industry Association lost a Federal Court challenge in March to force five Internet service providers, including Bell Canada, Rogers Cable and Shaw Communications, to hand over the names and addresses of 29 people who allegedly shared hundreds of songs with others in November and December.

The recording industry association wanted the names of subscribers who are currently identifiable only through a numeric Internet address and user handles. The association could not begin civil litigation until the alleged offenders were identified.

Court Limits Privacy Of E-Mail Messages

A company that provides e-mail service has the right to copy and read any message bound for its customers, a federal appeals court panel has ruled in a decision that could expand e-mail monitoring by businesses and the government.

The 2-to-1 decision by a panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 1st Circuit in Massachusetts alarmed privacy advocates, who said it torpedoes any notion that e-mail enjoys the same protections as telephone conversations, or letters when they are sorted by mail carriers.

The court ruled that because e-mail is stored, even momentarily, in computers before it is routed to recipients, it is not subject to laws that apply to eavesdropping of telephone calls, which are continuously in transit. As a result, the majority said, companies or employers that own the computers are free to intercept messages before they are received by customers.

"This puts all of our electronic communication in jeopardy if this decision isn’t reversed." said Jerry Berman, head of the Center for Democracy and Technology, a public interest policy group.

Peter B. Swire, an Ohio State University law professor who was a privacy adviser in the Clinton administration, said the ruling means that an e-mail provider "can intercept all your e-mail with impunity, and can read them and use them for its own business purposes."

Large companies that dominate e-mail services were quick to disclaim any desire to read their customers’ e-mail. America Online, Microsoft Corp., EarthLink Inc., Comcast Corp. and Yahoo Inc. have policies governing their terms of service that generally state that they do not read customers’ mail or disclose personal information unless required by law enforcement agencies.

"AOL does not monitor or intercept member communications, in accordance with AOL's privacy policy and terms of service," said Nicholas J. Graham, a company spokesman.

EarthLink spokeswoman Carla Shaw said the company does not "retain copies of e-mails, and we don't read individual e-mails."

But a small online company that sold out-of-print book lists did just that, sparking the case decided Tuesday by the appeals court. The now-defunct firm, Interloc Inc., also provided e-mail service to its members.

In January 1998, according to prosecutors, an Interloc vice president, Bradford C. Councilman, directed the firm's engineers to make copies of all incoming mail to its members from Amazon.com Inc., which also sells books.

The government charged that the company, which was later acquired by a California firm, wanted to get an idea of Amazon's book-selling strategy.

Prosecutors charged Councilman with gathering thousands of messages in violation of laws governing interception of wire, oral or electronic communications.

Councilman appealed, claiming that laws prohibiting interception did not apply because the messages were stored as a part of delivery to customers.

Andrew Good, Councilman's lawyer, declined to comment on his client's motives. But Good said no one ever complained about the practice and that the case resulted from a tip in an unrelated investigation.

Good said the decision mirrors other rulings that give employers and companies broad rights over e-mail stored in their systems.

In upholding a lower court decision, the appeals panel majority said Congress intended for "any temporary, intermediate storage" of communication to be governed by laws other than those involving wiretapping or other interception. The court rejected the government's argument that if communication is being transmitted and stored simultaneously, it is protected by interception laws.

"We believe that the language of the statute makes clear that Congress meant to give lesser protection to electronic communications than wire and oral communication," the court said. The judges acknowledged, however, that the wiretap law may now be outdated given advances in technology.

In dissent, Judge Kermit V. Lipez said the majority misread the law and that the ruling "will have far-reaching effects on personal privacy and security."

Like several privacy advocates, the judge raised particular alarm over what the decision might mean for the ability of law-enforcement to monitor e-mail.

Based on the court's ruling, law enforcement officers would need only a search warrant to gain access to e-mail before it reaches its recipient, instead of a wiretap order, which can be far harder to obtain.

The decision, Lipez said, "would undo decades of practice and precedent regarding the scope of the Wiretap Act and would essentially render the Act irrelevant to the protection of wire and electronic privacy."

In other legal cases, courts have treated temporary storage of electronic material differently. Swire said disputes have arisen over whether Internet service providers are liable when their customers have illegally copied music or other works on their systems, thus temporarily storing them on the ISP’s networks. Courts have found no such liability, he said.

A spokeswoman for the U.S. attorney’s office in Boston, which prosecuted the case, declined to comment on the decision.

An appeal of the case could put the office at odds with the FBI, which has been pushing Congress and the Federal Communications Commission for greater flexibility to monitor Internet communications.

"This decision makes clear that the law has failed to adapt to the realities of Internet communications and must be updated to protect online privacy," said Kevin Bankston, an attorney for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a privacy advocacy group.

EU Agrees To Stay Microsoft Penalties

European regulators have agreed to temporarily hold off on forcing Microsoft Corp. to change its business practices until a court hearing later this summer, a company spokesman confirmed yesterday.

The decision by the European Commission, following its ruling in March that Microsoft broke European Union antitrust laws, was largely a formality. Microsoft, based in Redmond, Wash., is appealing the ruling, which levied a fine of more than $600 million and would force the company to sell a version of Windows operating system without programs for playing digital video and music.

Late Friday, Microsoft asked the court to delay all penalties while it appeals, a process that could take years. The decision announced yesterday puts the penalties on temporary hold until the court can decide whether to suspend the sanctions for the duration of the appeals. Had the regulators not acted, those sanctions would have taken effect today.

Microsoft is accused of illegally using its Windows monopoly to squeeze out rival makers of software for playing digital entertainment. Because the Windows Media Player is distributed with the ubiquitous Windows, European regulators charge, other media player developers, such as Real Networks, are at an unfair disadvantage.

The European Commission, which is the executive arm of the EU, wants Microsoft to offer two versions of Windows in Europe - one with its own media player and one without. They hope this will encourage computer makers to seek deals from other media player companies to bundle their software with new machines.

Microsoft argues that removing its media player from Windows will degrade the operating system, and that there is significant competition from other media players, including Apple Computer Corp.’s iTunes.

Microsoft also is accused of trying to squeeze out rivals in the market for server systems, which power computer networks, by making it harder for competing software to work well with Windows. Microsoft denies these charges as well.

None of the court filings in Europe are made public, so the substance of the appeal was not known.

Microsoft Settles Arizona Antitrust Suit

Microsoft Corp. will offer as much as $105 million in product vouchers to settle an Arizona class-action lawsuit accusing it of using its monopoly power to overcharge for software.

The Arizona settlement, approved by a judge on Monday, concluded nine months of talks and comes as Microsoft looks to put antitrust claims behind it. The world's largest software maker has now settled such lawsuits in 11 states and the District of Columbia.

The Redmond, Washington-based company is also appealing a $600-million fine levied against it by the European Commission, as well as an order that it sell a version of Windows without media player software.

The plaintiffs' attorneys said the Arizona settlement, given preliminary approval by Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Michael O'Melia, covers businesses and consumers who bought Microsoft products in the state from 1996 to 2002.

Brian Goodwin, one of the class attorneys, said the deal covered a total of 7.8 million software licenses in Arizona.

Eligible users in Arizona who apply under the settlement would get vouchers of $15 for their past operating system purchases and $9 for past application purchases.

The settlement, apart from related fees and administration costs, will cost Microsoft between $52.3 million and $104.6 million, depending on how many vouchers are issued and used.

The settlement also includes a provision that some Arizona public school districts will get half of the value of any unclaimed vouchers, and then half the value of any vouchers that have been claimed but have not used to redeem software or computer-related hardware products.

Microsoft will fund the settlement from reserves already set aside for such claims, the company said.

"We're pleased by the opportunity to help schools all across Arizona get the computers and software they need," said Brad Smith, general counsel for Microsoft, in a statement. "The novel approach we've taken in structuring this settlement has not only allowed us to resolve this legal matter, but provide needed benefits to students at the same time."

Goodwin, the plaintiffs attorney, said that the settlement was the second-highest for Microsoft on a per-user basis, behind its $1.1 billion deal for California consumers in 2003.

The Arizona lawsuit had been certified as a class action in November 2000 and a state Supreme Court decision in August had cleared the way for it go forward, he said.

Final approval of the Arizona settlement is set for Dec. 10, Goodwin said. Class members will have 120 days to claim their vouchers after the settlement is approved.

Microsoft Settles Massachusetts Consumer Suit

Microsoft Corp. said on Tuesday it would offer as much as $34 million in product vouchers to settle a class action in Massachusetts, the latest in a series of suits claiming it broke laws on unfair competition and consumer protection.

In a joint release with the plaintiffs' attorneys, Microsoft said the deal received preliminary approval from Massachusetts Superior Court Judge Judith Fabricant on Monday. Microsoft also won preliminary approval on Monday for a similar settlement in Arizona worth nearly $105 million.

Microsoft has been working to put antitrust claims behind it, having settled such suits in 12 states and the District of Columbia over the past two years, for a total of more than $1.5 billion. The company has reserves set aside to pay for those settlements, the largest of which was a $1.1 billion deal with California plaintiffs in 2003.

As with the Arizona settlement and other such deals it has struck across the United States, Microsoft said it will provide half of the value of any unclaimed vouchers to certain Massachusetts school districts.

"The dollar amount may not seem large compared with other states, but Massachusetts' consumer protection law is limited to consumers and does not cover businesses and government," Ann White of Mager White & Goldstein LLP, one of the plaintiffs' attorneys, told Reuters.

"It is a good result because if the consumers choose not to put in a claim, that leaves more money for the underprivileged students within the commonwealth."

The class covers anyone in the state who bought certain Microsoft operating system or application products between early 1996 and late 2002. The vouchers cover both hardware and software purchases, though the value of the individual vouchers was not disclosed.

Appeals Court Upholds Microsoft Antitrust Deal

A U.S. appeals court upheld the government's landmark antitrust settlement with Microsoft Corp. on Wednesday, handing a huge victory to the world's largest software maker.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia unanimously endorsed the 2001 settlement and turned down appeals for stricter sanctions from the state of Massachusetts and two high-tech industry groups.

The settlement, approved by District Judge Colleen Kollar- Kotelly in 2002, gives computer makers like Hewlett-Packard Co. greater freedom to feature rival software on their machines by allowing them to hide some Microsoft icons on the Windows desktop.

Microsoft also must license key computer code that competitors need to make their server software work well with Windows.

Massachusetts and two technology-industry trade groups had argued the court should force Microsoft to redesign Windows and stop "commingling" programs like Internet Explorer with Windows. But the appeals court said the settlement struck the right balance.

"The district court, by remedying the anti-competitive effect of commingling, went to the heart of the problem Microsoft had created, and it did so without intruding itself into the design and engineering of the Windows operating system. We say, Well done!" Chief Judge Douglas Ginsburg wrote.

The same appeals court ruled in 2001 that Microsoft had illegally maintained its Windows operating system monopoly, but rejected another lower-court judge’s proposal to break the company in two.

A Microsoft spokeswoman declined immediate comment.

Massachusetts Attorney General Tom Reilly said the opinion showed antitrust laws are not working.

"Our high-tech economy will not reach its full potential unless regulators and the courts are willing to deal with Microsoft and its predatory practices," he said in a statement.

"We’re disappointed, obviously," said Ed Black, president and CEO of the Computer and Communications Industry Association, one of two trade groups that had challenged the deal. "The settlement remains a failure and it has not served the public interest."

Outfoxing the Phishers and Other Scammers

Quick! An exiled Nigerian businessman worth millions needs your help.

His funds have been tied up by the government and he needs your bank details to get the money out. Only you can help. If successful, you can share the millions. Everybody walks away happy.

Sound familiar?

E-mails with this very message are sent out daily. And every once in a while they lure in the odd victim. The result is always the same: The good Samaritan is wiped clean of his savings and the fraudster moves on to fresh prey.

The scam has evolved to a more diabolical level. Over the past year or so, some crafty fraudsters have ditched the tear-jerker prose for the straightforward instruction.

"Quick. Your bank details need updating," the message now reads. "Click on this link to submit them."

Each month, billions of such e-mails, masquerading as official messages from banks and online retailers, arrive in in-boxes. The scam is known as

"phishing."

They work with surprising effectiveness, as many come with a link to an authentic-looking bank or retailer site. The e-mail directs the user to input his bank or credit card details, and again, just one party - the fraudster - walks away happy.

In Web parlance, you've just been "phished."

British police recently estimated that phishing scams cost UK banks an estimated 60 million pounds last year. The economic toll of phishing in the United States is much worse, costing American banks and credit card companies $1.2 billion in 2003, according to Gartner Research.

Gartner estimates that 1.78 million Americans fell foul of the scam, each responding to the e-mail and revealing their personal details. The list of spoofed, or fake, sites is an impressive one. It includes eBay, just about every commercial bank in the UK, U.S. and Australia, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Help may be on the way in the form of a variety of computer programs - some from universities, others from major technology outfits - that aim to unmask the fraudsters.

The mission of the programs is to harpoon the problem by developing Web browsing toolbars that sniff out the fake sites and expose the phishers for the swindlers they are.

The idea is to take the Web link in a suspicious e-mail and type it into the toolbar and press return. Within moments you will know if you've landed on the real McCoy or an impostor's site posing as your bank.

To help detect the fakers, CoreStreet Ltd., a Cambridge, Massachusetts-based technology outfit, last month introduced a free product called SpoofStick at http://www.corestreet.com/spoofstick/.

When entering a site, like say eBay, via the SpoofStick browser extension (it works with Microsoft Internet Explorer and Mozilla FireFox browsers), the surfer is greeted with a clear message saying "you are on eBay."

If you type in what turns out to be a spoofed Web site address, the message will be very different, likely revealing the IP, or Internet Protocol, number - a confusing, but telltale sign you want nothing to do with this site.

Every computer that is connected to the Internet has a unique IP number consisting of 4 digits - each between 0 and 255 and separated by periods.

A similar detection tool comes from SpoofGuard (http://crypto.stanford.edu/SpoofGuard/), a California technology start-up.

And, eBay and Internet service provider EarthLink have been hit with so many phishing attacks they've decided to develop their own spoof detection toolbars. EarthLink's is available at http://www.earthlink.net/home/software/toolbar/; eBay's is at http://pages.ebay.com/ebay_toolbar/.

Computer security experts warn, however, that the toolbars should not lull users into a false sense of security.

"It’s the most sophisticated defense we have at the moment, but it’s not foolproof," said Pete Simpson, network security specialist at Clearswift, a British network security firm.

CoreStreet admits as much, saying on the SpoofStick site: "It’s not a comprehensive solution, but it’s a good start."

The spoof-proof browsers are viewed as the first line of defense in a novel new area of criminality.

"The next stage will see the scammers spoofing the toolbars. Then, a new technology will spring up to put an end to that," Simpson said.

Quoting a recent Nigerian e-mail scam: "You can take it to the bank."

Scob Virus Targets Financial Data

The so-called "Scob" virus that infiltrated possibly thousands of popular and mainstream Web sites apparently was trolling for financial data from unprotected PCs, according to antivirus firms tracking this latest malicious code.

For now, the danger has passed, reports Panda Software CTO Patrick Hinojosa. "Fortunately, this particular one has been defanged - for the moment," he told NewsFactor. He said that authorities apparently have shut down a Russian-based server that was harboring the code. Unfortunately, the hackers behind the scam are still at large. "All today’s events mean is that this particular server is out of commission. If someone else wants to set up another server, the whole thing can start all over."

Late Thursday, the U.S. Homeland Security Department put out a warning that a mysterious virus had attacked "thousands" of Web servers that power a number of popular Web sites.

The names of the sites still have not been identified. This may be for legal reasons, Hinojosa suggests. "It was not immediately apparent if a particular Web site got infected, so I think everyone is double checking for accuracy before they release names."

He said some of the sites were rumored to be U.S.-based.

Called "Scob" or "Download.Ject" or "Toofer," the virus targeted at least one version of Microsoft software, Internet Information Server, which operates many Web sites. Browsers who happened onto the IIS-powered sites using Microsoft Internet Explorer - sans the relevant patches, of course - would become infected. Customers whot have deployed Windows XP Service Pack 2 RC2 are not at risk, Microsoft said.

Much of this information was available this morning. What was not clear, however, was the reason behind the attack.

This latest episode is just another indication that the threat from viruses and other variants of malware has grown more severe. "Not that long ago, most of the worms originated from people who wanted to see what they could accomplish technically, or see how much damage they could cause," Hinojosa says.

"Now, it is clearly an organized for-profit occupation by many groups of people," he says, including organized spammers and organized criminal groups.

"That means they have more resources to devote to these endeavors; money to set up many servers, to put skilled people on the payroll to code these viruses and the ability to exploit the data in an organized manner."

Apple Previews Next Version of Mac OS X

Apple Computer Inc. on Monday previewed the next version of its Mac OS X operating system, which it said would include powerful search features that would put it far ahead of the next major update to Microsoft Corp.’s market-leading Windows software.

Cupertino, California-based Apple also introduced a 30-inch flat panel display - its largest yet - in a sleeker and trimmer housing, which adds to the 20-inch and 23-inch displays it already offers. That new offering puts Apple up against other PC companies that sell large flat panels, such as Dell Inc. and Hewlett-Packard Co.

Apple’s search technology, which it calls Spotlight, lets Mac users find any file, document or information created by any application on a Macintosh by entering the query in a search at the upper right hand corner of the desktop.

Simplifying the search process on a PC’s hard drive has emerged as one of the major goals of both Tiger and Microsoft’s next version of Windows, code-named Longhorn, which is due out in 2006.

"What they’ve (Apple) done with search is a key element of Longhorn," said analyst Tim Bajarin of Creative Strategies, adding that Apple’s next version of OS X, code-named Tiger, will be available to consumers at least a year or more before Longhorn.

Tiger will be available in the first half of 2005, Apple Chief Executive Steve Jobs said, and will cost $129.

Apple, best known for its Macintosh computers and the popular iPod digital music players, last updated the Mac OS X in October 2003 with version 10.3, code-named "Panther."

With Tiger, Apple will have pushed out five major releases of OS X since its debut in March 2001. Apple unveiled the new version during its annual conference for software developers, in a bid to encourage them to write more applications that work with the operating system.

"We think we are years ahead of Longhorn," Jobs told about 3,500 software developers in San Francisco, referring to the forthcoming major Windows update. "The other guys have been talking about it and we’re doing it."

Microsoft, the world’s largest software company, unveiled Windows XP, the latest major overhaul of its Windows operating system, in October 2001.

Apple has been on a roll lately with the iPod and its iTunes Online Music store. It has sold more than 3 million iPods and customers have purchased more than 80 million tracks from the music store.

As successful as those two ventures have been, however, sales of its Mac computers remain Apple’s largest source of revenue.

The company’s global share of the PC market has remained at 5 percent or below in recent years, but Jobs has indicated the company is happy to be a profitable niche player.

The 30-inch high-definition display monitor will be available in August and cost $3,299. The redesigned 20-inch and 23-inch monitors will go on sale in July and cost $1,299 and $1,999, respectively.

Apple Says It Will Delay New iMac Until September

Apple Computer Inc. said on Thursday its next-generation iMac desktop computer will be delayed until September and that it has stopped taking orders for the current iMac.

The delay means that Apple will miss the crucial back-to-school season for the new iMac. Apple earlier this week held its annual developer conference earlier this week and it often announces new products at the gathering.

"We planned to have our next-generation iMac ready by the time the inventory of current iMacs runs out in the next few weeks," the Cupertino, California-based company said in a statement. "But our planning was obviously less than perfect."

The company said it has stopped taking orders for the current iMac as it begins "the transition from the current iMac line to an all-new iMac line."

In the education market, Apple has historically emphasized its iBook notebook PC and the eMac desktop machine rather than the iMac computer, which has a circular base and a flat-panel screen that hovers above it.

An Apple spokesman declined to comment beyond the statement issued by the maker of the Macintosh computer and iPod digital music players.

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